

A FRECKLED KNIGHT.

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CHAPTER I.

On the porch of a farm-house, away down in Maine.

One hot afternoon in July, John Carter, as neat as a pin, stood in the doorway of the house, with a form that really could not be called thin, and a keen, small, snapping, black eye.

Over all the broad acres far stretching around, John Carter was monarch away. But the house was the kingdom of Mrs. John C. Her husband therein was as meek as could be, and yielded it all to her sway.

The good man had wanted for some time to get a small and intelligent boy, to go after cows and rake after cart, and do other chores that a wide-awake, smart, young lad is supposed to enjoy.

And so, when a great city's charity sent from out of its stifling hot streets a carload of Teddies and Patsys and Joes, whose last name, quite often, the Lord only knows, to breathe in the country air sweet,

John Carter went down to the depot where these young creatures from town had landed, and promised to take one of them, as he said, "To fill him chuck full of fresh air and rye bread, and learn him to be forehanded."

This step did not meet the smiling approval of thrifty, black-eyed Mrs. C.;



So when Mr. Carter came up the broad path, with the boy by his side, the good woman's wrath was really unpleasant to see.

"John Carter," said she, "now what have you got?" Some ragged young thief, I am sure, right out from the slums of the city, as bad, or it may be the very worst one that they had. Such creatures I cannot endure.

Her husband replied, "Now mother hold on! I can come out of the great wicked city, but I prove he's unworthy of honest folk's pity or that he's a thief, I am sure."

"John Carter, there's no use a-talkin' to me! No good can come of it from them streets. You'll find in a week it's not as I say. And certainly live to regret it one day, and pile up your sorrow in heaps."

Her husband laughed loud. "Well, mother," said he, "I'll give him a chance to show out. So don't pronounce judgment before he's been tried."

And you know that the boy is entitled beside to the benefit of every doubt."

"All right, Mr. Carter," his good wife replied, "I suppose you will have your own way. New York ain't the country, though, you'll find. And the people they raise are a different kind. You can try it. I've had my say."

The object of all this discussion stood by and took it all in with a grin. He was ragged and dirty, red-headed and small, and spoke with a curious bowery drawl. Such words as "der bloke" and "I kin."

His features were black and would have been pale were it not for the unnumbered freckles, which covered his face from his chin to his hair. His neck and ears, and in fact everywhere with red and brown patches and speckles.

His small eyes were black and keen as a hawk's. While rarely stored up in his jaw a small lump of comfort was hidden away. Where many another had been in his day, he said "navy plug" a good "chaw."

When asked what his name was he simply replied, "I've mostly called Mickey, dat's all." And so the boys' round, I suppose for a starter. And lacking a better, nicknamed him "Fresh Carter."

Into which he was ready to fall.

It was a new world to this waif from the streets. This quiet and plain country life. He soon began to grow ruddy and strong. And his cheek was a stranger to "navy" ere long.

More power to John Carter's wife.

He was willing, and witty, and droll as could be, and handy in house or outdoor. Well fed and well clothed, he seemed to enjoy the distinction of being the "Fresh-air Fund boy."

More than any he'd ever had before.

And Mr. and Mrs. John Carter grew more to like him as day followed day.

In spite of his slang and coarse bowery twang. And Freshy had fully decided to hang right there 'till they drove him away.

The Carters were blessed with only one child. Fair Jessie was only eighteen. As pretty a maid as ever essayed her clustering curls to hold in a staid way under her bonnet, I ween.

Her beauty but Freshy the very first week in danger of losing his heart. The second week found his defense much impaired. The third he found himself wholly ensnared. A foregone result from the start.

To bring her wild flowers from woodland and field. To saddle her horse for her ride.



To sit on the fence and see her go by. And get but a smile or glance of her eye. Would swell the lad's young heart with pride.

A month had gone by without any signs of Freshy's return to the city. So useful and all-around handy was he, the Carters declared it really would be to send him back there a great pity.

About this time at the farm-house arrived Two Summer boarders from town. Who wanted to breathe in the pure country air. And pay a good price for very plain fare. And business ventures to drown.

Felix Raven, who declared that he was a lawyer commanding large fees. A sort of Goliath among legal giants. Seeking relief from unnumbered clients in picking and shelling green peas.

John Mandelbaum claimed a physician to be. With a very large practice, of course. Who, leaving rich patients to pine for his pills, had sought in the country relief from their ills. Which his powders and pellets made worse.

The first was a tall, swarthy, muscular man. An athlete with clean-shaven face. The other was slender, with greenish, gray eye. His white hands wore jewels that made the fire fly.

His mustache drooped low with much grace.

In a very short time they both fell in love with Jessie, the farmer's fair daughter; The lawyer was eager his love case to gain. The doctor sought rest from his amorous pain. With it's author, and so they both sought her.

Though rivals they were they could not infer From Jessie's untroubled demeanor That either was gaining a point worth obtaining. Although each his powers of courtship was straining. And had since first they had seen her.

This was the condition of things at the Carters' That hot afternoon in July; But I also might add to the picture a lad In the background, whose face freckled and sad. With a small, keen, jealous black eye.

CHAPTER II.

When the mother of Jessie came forth on the porch.

As in the beginning I've stated, She lifted her voice in a summons so loud 'Twould have done a steam calliope proud With it to have been fairly roused.

The call was for "Freshy" as shrilly it rang After the afternoon air; The echoes replied from the fields green and wide. And cool, quiet woods where birds loved to bide.

And cool, quiet woods where birds loved to bide, But Freshy seemed not to be there. Had the good woman witnessed the exit peculiar He made but a short hour before. As out of the back kitchen window he crawled. And after him slowly an old shotgun hauled— Without a great shedding of gore—

She would not have wondered where Freshy could be. For she knew he thought more of that gun Than anything else except Jessie, and so It was his delight to take it and go Forth seeking Nimrodian fun.

At that very moment were hanging four chips. By their long bushy tails to his string. As he crunched in the grass in hopes there would pass A gay bobolink with his trumpet of brass.

The girl could but smile at the plight she was in. And said to herself she could not have been Much more of a mermaid if she had gone down With her foolish and furious lover to drown. She tried to walk homeward but found 'twas in vain.

And weakly sank back on the low seat again. The boy with his coat made a rest for her head. Then swift to the house for her father he sped.

CHAPTER III.

Now let us return to the farm-house again And see how matters fare there. When the voice of Mrs. John Carter was pealing Afar on the still Summer air.

As she stood on the porch two men came along The broad gravel walk to the door. And the lady was sure, as she looked them all over, That she never had seen them before.

They were strong looking, muscular, middle-aged men. Each seemed, in his plain suit of black, To give him a shot on the wing.

As Freshy lay there, lo! there came on the air The sound of voices quite near. Just over the wall beyond where some tall Thick bushes were growing he heard words fall Expressing both anger and fear.

He wriggled along like a snake through the grass To the wall and slyly looked over; He stood for a moment thus looking around, Then slid down and dug his bare toes in the ground. In his efforts to stifle a roar.

"Mashed finer'n snuff," chuckled Freshy at last. As he filled his mouth full of grass.

A fo' Nebuchadnezzar, a snicker to strangle. And convulsively twisted his legs in a tangle. Like a victim of fresh laughing-gas.

A voice o'er the wall grows angry and loud. And then Freshy pricks up his ears. And, cautiously rising, looks over to see What the meaning of all the commotion could be.

And this is the tableau appears: On a low rustic seat in a narrow green lane. That led to the river close by. Sat Jessie with sun hat slung over her arm. On her face an expression of fear and alarm. A defiant look in her blue eye.

Before her stood "Doctor" John Mandelbaum, with His greenish-gray eyes all ablaze; With features quite livid with passion, he said. As he shook his clinched fist at poor Jessie's head.

While Freshy looked on in amaze: "Dare you thus refuse the offer Of my love? beware, fair scoffer. Think you I'm the one to yield To another man the field. And give place to that foul craven, Scheming, lying Felix Raven? Never! Jessie, hearken now. If you do not promise me That you'll never, never be Felix Raven's wedded wife. In my arms you end your life In your river flowing by. Promise it or with me you die."

Jessie rose. Her face was pale. But her blue eyes did not quail. As she faced the man and said: "You I cannot, will not wed. I will marry whom I will. When I marry it will be To a man in whom I see At the least some faintest trace Of a gentleman's true grace. Who forgets not what is due To a lady, as do you: Your true character I see In your face, and words to me."

Longer Jessie would not stay. But the man stood in her way. With a furious face he cried: "Yield, or in your dawning tide Down with me you plunge to death!" Jessie came and held her breath. In his manner she could see Desperation. Could she flee? Vain the thought. If she should cry Loud for help no help was nigh. While before her stood her foe. Still she bravely answered "No!"

"That," he cried, with frantic yell, "Is, fair maiden, your death-knell!" As he sprang towards her, clear, Quick and sharp upon his ear. Rang the words, "Stand back, y' bloke!" Turning short to see who spoke, Ere he like a coward ran. He beheld the old shotgun Levelled o'er the wall at him. Looking business-like and grim. While a cool and keen black eye Sighting it he did spy. And the old gun's blackened bore Never looked so big before. A red head and freckled face Lent the picture quaint grace.

"Raise yer hands! Right about—Face! Forward—March!" With his razor blade And gnashing teeth the man obeyed: Towards the river slowly strayed. That there was danger well he knew When Freshy had at close range drew; When near the river's bank he turned. In vain with passion, danger spurred. Then with a yell and curse beside.

He plunged head foremost in the tide. And of him it could be said, If he a maiden still would wed. It certainly must henceforth be A fair mermaid of the sea.

Like a jumping Jack Freshy came over the wall. Chimpunks and freckles, old shotgun and all. And cried, as he hastened to poor Jessie's side, With a curious mixture of pity and pride In his voice, "Miss Jessie, der bloke's drowned dead!"

I ought have filled him chuck full of cold lead. I hopes yer'll excuse me fer not doin' so. But honest, Miss Jessie, I couldn't, y' know. Fer me gun she wan't loaded, but never mind now. So long as he's dead it don't matter how."

As Jessie gazed into the face of the lad, And thought of the narrow escape she had had, She held out her hand in an impulsive way. But the words of gratitude that she would say Came not from her lips, the trees whirled around.

The heavens grew dark, and down to the ground Would Jessie have fallen, but for the quick arm Of Freshy, who caught her and saved her from harm.

Her faintness was but for a moment, and when she opened her eyes he left her, and then Ran swift to the river and filled up his cap With water, and brought it without a mishap To Jessie and started to bathe her poor head. But poured a good share down her poor back instead. Which cold application to head, neck and spine Brought instant results one well may pine.

The girl could but smile at the plight she was in. And said to herself she could not have been Much more of a mermaid if she had gone down With her foolish and furious lover to drown. She tried to walk homeward but found 'twas in vain.

And weakly sank back on the low seat again. The boy with his coat made a rest for her head. Then swift to the house for her father he sped.

CHAPTER IV.

Like the son of a gun that he was in the fun Or the fight, to take part his intent. His caution he showed in pausing to load The gun with big "double B" Buckshot. Thus prepared he straightway repaired To a place where the fun he could see.

As he sprang o'er the wall beyond which the call For help had just come, he espied What looked at first sight like two men in a fight. And away from side to side.

As they stood face to face in a mighty embrace. And twisted, and struggled, and panted. The freckled-faced knight speulboud with delight. Surveied them, completely enchanted.

With neck far extended and eyeballs distended. And feet that extended. He gazed on the scene like one in a dream. As backward and forward they pranced.

It carried him back o'er memory's track To his old reckless life in the city: To the "kids" he had whopped and oftentimes mopped O'er the sidewalks so hard, rough and gritty.

His fighting blood rose clear down from his toes. He could hardly hold his emotion, And he knew no more where he was I declare. Than a boy on a raft in mid ocean.

To the man who looked smallest his sympathies ran. And he shouted out words of good cheer: "Stick to 'im, me hearty, you're a dandy old shot!" Now sock him one under der ear!"

The shorter man slipped on a piece of wet bark. That lay quite unseen in his track. And ere he recovered his balance the other Had landed him square on his back.

Then the fellow on top a moment did stop. But drew out a long-bladed knife. And raised it on high with a look in his eye That boded the other short life.

As the keen blade descended the other extended His hand, catching it as it fell.

And the bewildered look of the Sheriff it took The freckled-faced knight to enjoy. "Well, well," said the man, "you don't lack for names! But what is your last name, I pray?" "Last name?" said the lad: "Well, mebbe I had one; I couldn't just say."

"But what was the name of your father, my boy?" "Me fadder dey called Speckled Jack."

"But that was not all. Was his last name not Hall?" "I reckon hit war far a fack!"

Tears sprang to the eyes of the Sheriff. Said he, "Your father, my boy, is my brother." The boy shook his head. "He can't be," he said. "He's dead, 'nd so is me mudder."

The freckled-faced knight awoke at the sight.

As if in a tussle he'd make a man bustle To keep the dirt off from his back. Politely accosting the lady they asked If her husband was "anywhere 'round."

She showed them the field in the distance where he Would be most probably found. The men then remarked on the beautiful scene Of woodland and field far and wide. Suggesting it would be a very nice place For worn city people to hide.

This led Mrs. Carter to say that she had Already two boarders on hand. And what with the double toll and of trouble. Two were about all she could stand.

The men exchanged glances, and one of them said. As he slowly punched holes in the ground. With a stout heavy case, he would like to obtain Their names, and could they be found?

They also desired a description of each. And said, in a casual way. They thought they were somewhat acquainted with them. And hoped they might meet them that day.

A very minute description they got. Which both seemed happy to gain. Then bowing politely they walked away lightly Through the gate that led into the lane.

As they passed out of sight one quietly said, "Neatly cornered, old man, don't you say?" The other replied with a grin very wide, "Our best job in many a day."

They passed down the lane and we will return To Freshy the freckled knight bold. Who so bravely essayed to save a fair maid From a plunge in the river so cold.

As he came down the lane some help to obtain For the maiden fair in distress. He passed on the way where thick elders gray Formed a sort of a wilderness.

As onward he ran a stout looking man Came out of the bushes behind him. And said, as he gazed after him in amaze, "Go it, young un! I guess you'll find him."

And then he turned round and sprang with a bound Into the thick bushes again. While Freshy's short legs played "mumblety-peg" With the grass as he sped down the lane.

And just then as Freshy was thinking of Jessie. And snickering low as he thought How neatly he had her lover gone mad. With an empty old shotgun caught.

A pistol's sharp ring and the whistle and ping Of a bullet quite close to his ear Brought him to a stand, old shotgun in hand. With a look more of wonder than fear.

Another sharp crack came echoing back. And with it a sort of yelp. They followed a cry from a meadow close by. Which sounded a good deal like "Help!"

The boy heard the call and stayed not all On his order of going, but went.



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The freckled-faced knight awoke at the sight.

For murder was not in his creed. A square, stand-up fight was joy and delight. But this was a cowardly deed. Such a horrible thing he never could stand. For all the gold under the sun. And his young blood ran colder as quick to his shoulder Came the heavily loaded old gun.

With a cool, steady aim that was always the same. He pulled the hard trigger once more. And a big load of lead unerringly sped. And straight through the lifted arm tore.

With a terrible yell the wounded man fell On his side, and ere he could rise The other had caught him fast by the throat. And shut off his breath and his cries.

Then out of the brush near by with a rush Came a man without hat, out of breath. Who sprang with a bound to where on the ground The two men were battling to death.

The short man looked glad to see him, he had His hands full to manage his foe. Although his right arm could do no more harm. He continued much vigor to show.

"Snap the bracelets on, Dick; you can't be too quick," Said the short man while gasping for breath. "I'd begun much to fear you wouldn't get here In time to be in at the death."

With a metallic click the handcuffs were quick On the wrists of the wounded man placed.



Who madly glared 'round as he lay on the ground. As if they were not to his taste. "Dick, that was the toughest pull, and the roughest. I'm sure that I ever had."

"Well, Sheriff, we've got him," said Dick: "but who shot him?" "Why, that boy—but where is the lad?" They looked all around and saw on the ground By the wall, a short distance away. The freckled-faced knight in a sorrowful plight. "Completely knocked out," so to say.

The fractious old gun took a hand in the fun And gave a Magnumpian kick Against its big load, and thereby it showed Poor Freshy a very mean trick.

In a way one might deem, and really would deem. Quite human, 'twould kick its best friend At the least provocation, with no hesitation, Nor offer the insult to mend.

CHAPTER IV.

In this case the kick was so hard and so quick That it landed the knight on his head. He struck a large stone, gave a queer little groan. Then lay where he fell as if dead.

"But, Sheriff, you're wounded!" said Dick, as he turned To the place where the shorter man stood. With the blood running down from his hand to the ground. "That chap meant to fix you for good."

"Oh, never mind me," said the Sheriff, "but see To that boy the first that you do. But for him and his gun my race 'd been run: 'Twas a mighty close call, it tell you."

Between the white lips of the knight the man tipped. The mouth of a daak of old rye. Which had the effect, as you well might expect, Of making him open one eye.

The first words he said when he held up his head And began to show symptoms of life. Although not artistic, were characteristic—"Did I ping der bloke wid de knife?"

The Sheriff replied, as vainly he tried His deep agitation to hide. "But for you on the spot, and your wonderful shot. Right there on the ground I'd have died."

"You know what to do, and you did it well, too: At your coolness and skill I'm amazed. Not one man in ten could have done it, so then You're entitled to ten times the praise."

Then the Sheriff bent down and gazed in the face Of the knight in a curious way. "There's something about you that seems to me strange; Now, what is your name, boy, I pray?"

"Me new name is Freshy, me old name was Mickey," Said he: "I am John Carter's boy."



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JESTS OF JOLLY JOKERS.

WIT AND HUMOR GATHERED FROM OUR FUNNY CONTEMPORARIES.

Crawling Out of It. (From Judge.)



Mr. Coaks—I seen yer, yo' brack scorpioni! Mr. Rendles—Seen meh what? Mr. Coaks—Seen yo' a-lookin' at yo' feet 'n laffin'. Mr. Rendles—I warn't laffin' at yo' feet—'dead I wuzent. Mr. Coaks—What wuz yo' gassin' at den? Spit it out troofol now! Mr. Rendles—Mistah Wiggins, heeb, ased me how many feet dey wuz in a yarb, 'n all I says wuz dat it pended on who owned d' feet.

Where Men Play Women's Parts. (From The New York Times.) "I see it stated," remarked Gassman, that di voices and elopements are unknown in China. "Indeed!" replied Pangie. "Then whare does China get its stage-elevating actresses?"

A Fine Stable. (From The New York Times.) Mrs. Singleton—How is business down at the factory, John? Mr. Singleton—Just booming, my dear. We put in a new engine last week, twenty-horse power.

Mrs. Singleton—Twenty-horse power! Oh, John, I must come down and see the lovely creature. You know I am so very fond of horses.

Worth Trying. (From The New York Times.) Sotleigh (walking in the Boston Public Garden, to friend)—Look at that sign: "No dogs allowed in this garden." Friend—Well, what of it? Sotleigh—I'm going to have one of those on my place next year. The dog has scratched up everything we've planted this season, and how nice everything looks here!

Worse Than Piles. (From The New York Times.) Jones—I should think the flies would annoy you. Don't they bite your bald head? Smith—But suppose I had hair. Do you catch on, "No." "Of course you don't, but my wife would."

For Short. (From The New York Times.) Miss Beacon Hill—What is your brother's name? Miss Wabash—Lucullus Swinburne Hobbs; but we call him "Cully," for short.

A City Nuisance. (From The New York Times.) First Hunter—You missed that rabbit by about ten feet. Second Hunter—Well, you see the truth is, a fellow gets tired of slaughtering them all the time. I did that to break the monotony.

Companion. (From The New York Times.) Mrs. Freelinghusen—Dress mah heart! T Fd knowed d' pore thing would squeal so, I would n' biled him.

A Mean Trick. (From The New York Times.) Griggs—What is the matter between you and Digger? I thought you used to be sworn friends. Digger—So we were once; but that is over now. Why, what separated you? "He made me a present of a fountain pen."

A Man of Push. (From The New York Times.) "Your father is an easy 'come-day, go-day' sort of fellow, isn't he, Clara?" "Don't mistake him, George. I have had suitors before now who thought that of him and who have subsequently been obliged to admit that he was a person of considerable push."

A Churchly Subject. (From The Philadelphia Record.) Wicked Boarder (on Sunday)—You do not read Sunday papers, I believe, Mrs. De Goode. Mrs. De Goode (severely)—No, I do not, and I am grieved to find that you do.

"I was only going to say that this copy of the Sunday Record has a two-column account of that minister who was arrested for improper conduct." "Oh, if there is anything in the paper about ministers, that's different. Thank you."

Ought to Run Him Down. (From Judge.) Chicago Detective—I understand that the Chief has hired a special artist to look out for Murderer Hanson. Subordinate—What good is a special artist in cases of that kind? Chicago Detective—Why, man! don't you know that the special artist is always "on the spot?"

A Saving Fad. (From The New York Times.) Tony—Hurt you, dee Wally—Not a bit, on my chrysanthem.

